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Identical letters dated 30 March 2017 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I should like to convey to you the position of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the thirty-seventh report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (S/2017/244).

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms the points made in its previous responses to reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the aforementioned Security Council resolutions. Regrettably, the report maintains its broadly negative framework and ignores the real causes of Syrian suffering and the issue of the delivery of humanitarian assistance. These are primarily attributable to the spread of terrorism and foreign terrorist fighters backed by Governments of United Nations Member States such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and the persistent imposition of unilateral coercive economic measures on the Syrian people by the United States of America, the European Union and other States, and the obstruction of efforts toward a peaceful political resolution by certain States that benefit from the prolongation of the Syrian crisis.

Below are some of the key observations of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the thirty-seventh report of the Secretary-General:

1. The report omits the significant and major role played by the Syrian State and its institutions in providing basic services, aid and support to all Syrians without discrimination so that they are able to withstand and move beyond this crisis. The report also omits the significant efforts made by the Syrian Government and the facilities it has provided to Syrians who have fled from the terror of armed terrorist groups. In particular, it has helped to evacuate civilians who have fled from Aleppo's eastern neighbourhoods to its western neighbourhoods, and it has provided food aid, adequate shelter and medical and educational assistance.

2. The Syrian Government has a constitutional and legal duty under national legislation and international law to defend its people against the terrorism of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Nusrah Front and associated entities and terrorist operatives with numerous names and allegiances. The success

of humanitarian operations in Syria is fundamentally attributable to the Syrian Government's considerable efforts in that regard.

3. The Syrian Government reiterates that in the course of carrying out its counter-terrorism efforts, it has complied fully with the provisions of international law and international humanitarian law regarding the protection and security of civilians and the safety of civilian service facilities, such as hospitals and schools.

4. The Syrian Government is committed to the cessation of hostilities agreement that entered into force on 30 December 2016. The terrorist groups have made no such commitment; they have continued to violate the agreement, carrying out brutal terrorist crimes and suicide attacks against civilians and service facilities in several areas in the governorates of Damascus, Rif Dimashq, Hama, Dar'a, Ladhiqiyah, Homs and others. They have also fired shells and other projectiles at civilians in numerous cities and governorates, leading to dozens of dead and hundreds of wounded.

5. The Syrian Government stresses that the Secretariat should cautiously assess the sources of its information and not rely on so-called "open sources" or other sources that are politicized, biased toward terrorist groups and have no credibility, as their primary concern is to direct false allegations at the Syrian Government and its allies. The reports produced by the Secretariat and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) have, unfortunately, been a far cry from the truth. They have relied on lies and allegations spread by armed terrorist groups and the regional and foreign parties and Governments that support and protect them, and by artificial entities such as the so-called White Helmets.

6. The Syrian Government rejects the report's insistence on making the legal error of referring to the armed terrorist groups as the "non-State armed opposition" when they know that these groups are in fact terrorists associated with ISIL and the Nusrah Front and use civilians as human shields. These groups have also used water as a tool of war and collective punishment and blackmail; have targeted civilians and populated areas with mortars, tanks, missiles and car bombs; and engage in torture, kidnapping, murder and sabotage.

7. The Syrian Government regrets that the report persists in promoting the operations of the so-called international coalition and its allies, not to mention the Euphrates Shield operations. The report also deliberately ignores the effects of such operations, including the loss of innocent civilian lives in northern and eastern Syria and the enormous destruction of Syrian infrastructure, particularly oil and gas wells, dams, bridges and water and energy sources. Most recently, the "international coalition" and its allies struck key bridges in the eastern governorates of Syria, including the new Raqqah Bridge, in addition to the Euphrates dams and their environs. The latter could cause an environmental, humanitarian and environmental disaster that would threaten the lives, villages and farms of Syrians living there, and could spread to Iraq. Given these catastrophic implications, the Secretariat must fulfil its responsibility and provide detailed information to the international community about the effects of the operations of the so-called international coalition. Some of those effects are increasing social pressures on Syrians and affecting their livelihoods, development capacities and funding for reconstruction.

8. The Syrian Government regrets that the report uses pejorative and opaque language in paragraph 11, which speaks of population displacements from the region of Khafsah in rural Aleppo as a result of operations carried out by the Syrian Government. Meanwhile, the report culpably neglects to point out that the Syrian Government's liberation of that region from the terrorist ISIL organization led to the resumption of the water supply from the Khafsah pumping station to millions of civilians in Aleppo governorate.

9. The Syrian Government regrets the misleading approach adopted by the report in Box 1, "Key points in February 2017". If the report's authors had respect for their mandate and for professionalism and objectivity, their account of the incident of 13 February 2017 would have been thorough and verified. It would have mentioned that it was ISIL members who cut off the water supply in and around Aleppo; that the Maghlah Bridge in Raqqah was destroyed by the "international coalition" and the forces aligned with it; and that areas in the eastern Ghutah area of Rif Dimashq governorate were besieged from within by armed terrorist groups, which use civilians from those areas as human shields.

10. The Syrian Government reiterates that it alone is responsible for protecting Syrians, and that Member States and international organizations, including the United Nations, must respect and observe this principle. The United Nations must exert pressure on Governments that have violated the rights of Syrians by using terrorism to achieve political objectives and interests.

11. The Syrian Government reminds the Secretariat that it must stop ignoring the significant efforts made and facilities provided by the Syrian Government in order to provide vaccination campaigns in Syria.

12. The Syrian Government reiterates that the Secretariat has no mandate to set out data on specific Syrian governorates; the section on Dar'a governorate, for instance, contains erroneous and politicized information. Rather, the Secretariat ought to have addressed the suffering of civilians in Dar'a governorate as a result of terrorist acts and the practices the Nusrah Front and allied armed groups.

13. The Syrian Government strongly rejects the bias of the Secretariat towards the Turkish Government. In paragraph in paragraph 30, for example, the report conceals the true reason for which the Turkish Government deliberately closed the Nusaybin border crossing and refused December 2015 to approve United Nations requests to deliver humanitarian assistance to Hasakah governorate through that crossing. This refusal is aimed at increasing the suffering of Syrian civilians in Hasakah governorate at the hands of armed terrorist groups, particularly ISIL. In this regard, we wish to point out that the Syrian Government notified the Resident Coordinator that it consented to the reopening of the Nusaybin border crossing, provided that humanitarian assistance was delivered through the crossing in coordination with the Syrian Government, as represented by the Governor of Hasakah, and distributed through the relief subcommittee in Hasakah. However, the Turkish Government has repeatedly refused to respond to United Nations requests for opening of the crossing, and the United Nations has not pursued serious action in this regard out of deference to the sensibilities of the Turkish Government.

14. During the period covered by the report, the Syrian Government facilitated a number of medical evacuations and provided humanitarian assistance to

Syrian towns and cities without discrimination. Recently, humanitarian assistance was delivered to the towns of Kafraya, Fu'ah, Madaya and Zabadani, along with many other areas described by the United Nations as "besieged" and "hard-to-reach".

15. The Syrian Government reiterates that it has approved entry of medical supplies with the inter-agency convoys, and approved requests made by United Nations organizations operating in Syria, contrary to the allegations contained in paragraph 22 of the report.

16. The Syrian Government once again calls on the Secretariat to adhere to its mandate and report on the economic, social and humanitarian suffering of Syrians due to the continued imposition of coercive unilateral economic measures by the United States, the European Union and other States. Those measures target key sectors such as health, electricity, energy, trade, finance and remittances that provide basic and life-sustaining services to the Syrian people and are needed for relief operations. The Syrian Government stresses that continued and deliberate disregard of this fundamental issue could be construed as support for violations of the Charter and relevant United Nations resolutions on the part of those State Governments imposing the unilateral economic, financial and trade measures on Syria. Such unilateral coercive measures are illegitimate and should therefore be rescinded.

17. The Syrian Government recalls its previous concerns regarding false information included in the report, for example:

- The Syrian Government approved the United Nations convoy plan for February in a memorandum dated 31 January 2017, and not 1 February 2017 as stated in paragraph 28 of the report.
- Since the beginning of the current year, the Syrian Government has approved two requests from the World Health Organization (WHO). The first was a request for WHO to deliver medical assistance, including dialysis sessions, to Duma in Rif Dimashq. The second was a request for WHO to send medical assistance to Hasakah governorate.
- To date, the Syrian Government has granted approval to 25 international non-governmental organizations to work in the area of humanitarian and food assistance in Syria. Those organizations have the facilities necessary for their work in accordance with the national laws of Syria.
- In 2016, the Syrian Government granted more than 1,400 entry visas to United Nations staff. During the month of February, it approved 46 applications for entry visas to Syria (not 26, as stated in the report) and 65 applications for renewal of residence (not 33, as stated in the report).

18. The Syrian Government reminds the Secretariat that responsibility for the continued suffering of Palestinian refugees in Yarmuk camp and elsewhere lies with the terrorist ISIL organization, which has blocked humanitarian assistance to the camp and its environs since 2016.

19. The Syrian Government rejects the Secretariat's continual promotion of cross-border assistance, and reiterates that such assistance is ineffective, given that most of it falls into the hands of armed terrorist groups deployed in the targeted areas. The notifications sent to the Syrian Government do not meet the minimum

standard of credibility with regard to figures, data, number of beneficiaries and information on the parties that receive and distribute assistance to civilian beneficiaries.

20. The Syrian Government reiterates that the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic cannot carry out its duty, as it has not been able to verify to date that this cross-border assistance is reaching its rightful beneficiaries. We remind you that the Bab al-Hawa, Bab al-Salamah and Ramtha crossings are entry points for arms and materiel being smuggled to armed terrorist groups in Syria. The Syrian Government strongly rejects the report's continued bias in favour of Turkey and Jordan when discussing the delivery of cross-border assistance. The Syrian Government reiterates that the Syrian Arab Red Crescent stands ready to monitor the delivery of humanitarian assistance to its intended recipients, but the Secretariat has in the past rejected that proposal.

21. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms its long-standing position that the crisis in Syria requires a political solution based on dialogue among Syrians under Syrian leadership without foreign intervention and without preconditions. The Syrian Government emphasizes that it is fighting terrorism in order to arrive at a political solution and to ensure greater humanitarian access to Syrians in need. It reminds the Secretariat that the success of the political process and any significant improvement in the humanitarian situation will depend, above all, on creating a climate conducive to a serious and non-politicized international and regional commitment to fighting terrorism and on an immediate end to the unilateral coercive economic measures being imposed on the Syrian people with no legal or moral basis. The Syrian Government has played a constructive role in the success of the Astana meetings and in the establishment of a cessation of hostilities, and has strived towards the success of the current Geneva talks.

22. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic once again calls on the Security Council to prevail on the States that support and finance armed terrorist groups to refrain from so doing, in implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions on combating terrorism and the financing thereof, in particular resolutions 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014), 2199 (2015) and 2253 (2015). Compliance with and enforcement of those resolutions is the key to resolving the situation in Syria and delivering unprecedented humanitarian assistance to those in need in Syria.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Mounzer **Mounzer**
Minister Plenipotentiary
Chargé d'affaires a.i.